1: Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
Saramacca

A NIGHT AT S'EI

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[539]

" . . . *It is late,*
Soon night will meet day . . . "

they chanted, as others joined them. Dancing to the slow rhythm of the singers, lamps in hand, all took up the song, until the bassia's wife led the way down the path. In a few moments the flicker of the oil lamps radiated in many directions, and the quieted dancers followed by their families went home singing. [536A]

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AT THE COURT OF THE GRANMAN

Now it was the Granman's turn to supply the interpolations, while Kasanya and Bibifo reported.

"Yes, so it is. So I know it to be myself. So I have heard," he spoke when they paused.

But when the ceremonial greetings were over, and the conversation turned to down-river affairs, the Granman leaned forward in his chair and talked with the men informally. They were all clan members, or men belonging to clans whose allegiance to the Granman's rule was undoubted, and they talked over many things in the way men do when they meet with their own kind.

The room was growing darker. Yankuso called through the slatted wall against which he was leaning, and the young man who had fired the guns entered.

"Bassia, it is getting late. We must leave this house to the white man. These men with me are my friends. They must drink before they leave."

The bassia took the decanter from the table, and from the shelf underneath it, where we could dimly see shells and containers of shot, he took several small glasses. Before taking the glass to his lips, each man poured some of the liquor on the ground as a libation to the Earth Mother, and, as each drank, he turned to Yankuso and asked if he might leave.

"*Mi da permissi*—I grant you permission," he said to each.

When we had finished our meal, it was already dark. At the door of his own house, Granman Yankuso was sitting on a low stool.

"I have something for you," he said, disappearing inside his house. When he came out, he held in his hand some black object, which we were unable to identify. "You have fire?" he asked, as he suspended this object from a tree which grew between his house and the one in which we were staying.

"There was a white Hollander here who brought this to me. He went from here farther into the bush. He never came out. Light is a good thing at night. When visitors

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come, I bring the lamp out. This is a big fire. In the village of my father, across the river, they can see it."

The blazing light made the night seem darker.

"Bak'a," the Granman went on. "For many days you and your woman have been on the river. You are tired. Tomorrow, when you have slept, you will be refreshed. Tomorrow my chiefs will be here. You will tell us why you have come, what you want to do."

He turned toward his house.

"Du mundu, Bak'a," he said. "Let all sleep well."

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123 179 "You must have strong obia from Africa—strong snake obia—for the gods to have spoken so well of you!"

But when the Granman asked, there was no refusing. That day word was sent to all in the village that the Bakra was giving a cinema show in the bush.

Long before dark the entire village had gathered in front of our doorway. The children had been around since early afternoon. Against the council-house wall we hung a white sheet, and some feet away we stood our folding table and on it the little projector. The show was about to begin.

[354] The Granman who sat a little to one side gave orders to the latecomers to extinguish the flames of their small oil lamps and their lanterns, and the large torch which he had so proudly shown that first night, and which had since illuminated the clearing nightly, was also extinguished.

The illustrations we had photographed were from volumes on the people of the West Coast of Africa—Ashanti and the Gold Coast, Dahomey, Nigeria, Benin, the Cameroons, Loango, and the Congo. Our first year's experiences among these people had taught us that it would not be well to show them too many ceremonial pictures. Photographs of sacrifices of animals other than fowls, we had felt, too, would not be wise to introduce. Such a picture as that of the Ashanti Sasabonsum, the "evil Apuku," as the Bush Negroes whom we had allowed to see the illustration named it, we had also decided should best be shown to individuals here and there. For the general showing, we relied upon pictures of cicatrizations, of hairdressing and teeth filing, of rafts floating on African lakes, of pottery making and cloth weaving, of laying fires and the doing of other household tasks, of carvings, and finally of one or two priests and priestesses in states of possession.

[342] We waited for a signal from the Granman to begin. About the dark clearing the huts, with their roof poles meeting on top like great horns, gave a strange effect to the scene, for with the moving and shifting of bare feet it seemed as though everything in that clearing strained to fall in line

412 /8 cont./
[672] culprit is condemned to find the requital in his offspring. His
[567] children, children's children, and great-grandchildren must render slave services for the family of the person poisoned.

692 Moreover, they usually act in accordance with the judgment and the decision of their elders or council members. Most punish-
681 ments consist of whip lashes.

Chapter IV

Weapons

411 These consist of rifles, machetes, bow and arrow, and lances.
278 In some cases they also use a kind of cudgel (1). The most dangerous
682

1. An Indian weapon called apoetoe.

one that they possess, however, is an assortment of vegetable poisons with which they can secretly strike their enemies and whose effects manifest themselves slowly, but are usually lethal. They not only mix these with one food or another, or in snuff or tobacco, but in the case of some can merely bring them in contact with a part of the body and thereby produce to the most infectious results.

/9/

Chapter V

Dwellings, Practices, Customs, Housekeeping

342 Their huts are constructed low above the ground from un-
824 worked round wood, covered with pina, the leaves of a palm species (1), and surrounded by palisade pales.

1. Euterpe oleracea Mart.

352 The couches and sleeping places within are also made of paling.

354 Inside the hut is found the hearth or place for the fire, on
372 which they cook and in which they constantly maintain a fire for

354 /9 cont./
[372] they do not like to be without it; at least they do not like to
[353] sleep without a fire. Their weapons hang above their sleeping
[513] place, which is a hammock, in which man and wife sometimes lie
342 together. Rarely do more than one man and one woman with their small children live in a single hut.

296 Their articles of clothing, as well as other small belongings,
251 are kept in pagalen, a kind of plaited basketwork, while they keep
415 water, strong drinks, sugar juice, rice, salt, and so forth in
824 calabashes and godos (2).

2. Both hollowed-out fruit rinds of the Crescentia cagete L. and the Cucurbita lagenaria L., plants from the family of the Cucurbitaceae.

415 Some of them have cedarwood clothes-chests, which must be specially mounted with a great deal of copper; one also sometimes finds liqueur cellars with gilded bottles.

353 For the rest everything is left out in the open in the hut.

264 Often many men come together in one hut for their meals and eat out of one large bowl or calabash. The women withdraw after having placed on very low tables several calabashes or bowls of food for their husbands in the circle in which they are seated, never forgetting to add a large calabash with clean water for washing the hands before and after the meal. The women gather in another hut in order to consume what they kept out for themselves beforehand and what has been left by their husbands.

[888] If an aged person or a highly placed person is in their midst,
[554] he is offered the calabash of food first, so that he may take from it what he wants and eat it by himself from an ordinary plate, although seated in the circle, /10/ while the others partake of their meal from the large bowl. In general they talk with one another during the meal, the highly placed person also taking part in the conversation.